

# *Diplomacy and world power*

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*STUDIES IN BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY,  
1890–1950*

EDITED BY

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CHAPTER 1

*'A world apart': gentlemen  
amateurs to professional  
generalists*

In celebrating the achievements of Zara Steiner, this chapter seeks to thread through a number of aspects of the British diplomatic world since 1815, a world on which together we have shared and share ideas and projects. Its focus is on some of the ways in which, despite external pressures for change, the Foreign Office and diplomatic service retained and protected well into the twentieth century many styles and patterns of behaviour established during the previous century.

After the Foreign Office and diplomatic service were amalgamated in 1919, it was soon clear that the ostensibly merged service had assumed most of the traditions and practices of the latter. Successive governments since 1945 have continued, sometimes somewhat reluctantly, to tolerate and accept the justification for such traditions and practices, even after the harsh review in 1977 by Kenneth Berrill's Central Policy Review Staff investigation. This acceptance, and the consequent associated financing, have ensured the survival within the diplomatic service of a sense of distinctiveness within the civil service. That sense of distinctiveness has in its turn helped to perpetuate those traditions and practices. Sir David Kelly even went so far as to assert that, when he joined the diplomatic service, 'it was regarded as part of the King's Household and not really part of the Civil Service at all'.<sup>1</sup> The series of investigations, which began in 1962 with the Plowden inquiry, have all with different emphasis focused and continue to focus on the benefits and disadvantages of the distancing of the service from the home civil service. To a certain extent, the late twentieth-century British

<sup>1</sup> Sir David Kelly, *The Ruling Few* (London, 1952), p. 367.

diplomatic service still sees itself as 'an institution apart ... a corps d'élite'.<sup>2</sup>

That *esprit de corps*, that genuine sense of 'specialness', that distancing of the diplomatic service from the rest of the British civil service, derived not only from its particular political functions but also from the peculiar nature of the Embassy and legation abroad as it had become established by 1815. It was the enduring concept of the mission abroad as a family, and a particular type of family at that, which was to characterise the service till long after 1919. Lady Paget remembered how much business had been transacted after dinner at the Embassy in Vienna as late as the early 1890s and how she had helped to decipher telegrams.<sup>3</sup> Once recruited and successfully set on the salaried career ladder, for the ambitious young diplomat the choice of bride was obviously important. The persistence of the family embassy and the continuing importance of social hospitality in the diplomat's representational role ensured and still ensure a particularly high profile for the diplomatic wife. In the years before 1914, experience of an aristocratic or even a royal social *milieu* was to prove invaluable for a young woman faced with managing a diplomatic household in one of the major European capitals. Such women as Lady Elizabeth Yorke, wife of Sir Charles Stuart, and Lady Henrietta Cavendish, wife of Lord Granville, both ambassadors at Paris, could face the early nineteenth-century diplomatic world with equanimity. In 1885 Sir Edward Malet reported with some smugness on his wife, Lady Ermyntrude Sackville Russell, to the foreign secretary, a later Lord Granville, soon after their arrival in Berlin, 'I am glad to say that Ermyn seems to take to her public duties as if she were to the manner born.'<sup>4</sup> Marriage to the daughter of a senior diplomat could prove particularly advantageous as in the case of Cecil Spring-Rice who was fortunate enough as first secretary at Berlin to marry Florence Lascelles, only daughter of Sir Frank Lascelles, his ambassador: after the death of her mother she had run the Embassy for him most successfully. Horace Rumbold, son of a diplomat, proposed to and was accepted by Ethel Fane, daughter of a diplomat, on promotion to first secretary in 1904. As long as the Embassy remained a home as well as an office the family concept survived and continued long after to be admired. Sir David Kelly commented on the 1920s image of 'a small family corporation' and on the lack of demarcation between private and official life.<sup>5</sup> An obituary tribute to Lady Sheffield commented on the atmosphere in the 1950s at

<sup>2</sup> Sir Julian Bullard, quoted in Simon Jenkins and Anne Sloman, *With Respect, Ambassador: an inquiry into the Foreign Office* (London, 1985), p. 24. In 1994 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office felt confident enough to permit the filming by the BBC of a television series 'True Brits' within the office and in embassies overseas, which underlined the distancing.

<sup>3</sup> Walpurga, Lady Paget, *Embassies of Other Days*, 2 vols. (London, 1923), II, p. 555.

<sup>4</sup> Public Record Office, Granville Papers, PRO 30/29/172. 18 Apr. 1885.

<sup>5</sup> Kelly, *Ruling Few*, pp. 75, 134.

the Embassy at Washington when her husband was ambassador there, 'Under them, the Embassy was a true diplomatic family.'<sup>6</sup> It was only with the gradual separation of the Embassy's offices from the official diplomatic residence that the family ethos began to weaken. Its influences remain.

Not only did the staff work in offices at the residence. The junior staff were unpaid and often lived there. There can be no doubt that the persistence of unpaid staff living and working in missions abroad aided the survival of the family concept. In the eighteenth century it had been quite common for young men, sons of friends or relatives of a minister, to arrange informally to spend time in the diplomatic household helping in the work, considering such experience helpful to a future political career. Attempting to increase efficiency in 1825, Canning instructed that all such people could only be attached to a mission with the written consent of the secretary of state. In 1856, in the hope of ensuring at least a basic competent educational standard for recruits, examinations for unpaid attachés were instituted. They were designed to test handwriting, English and French dictation, French and one other language, geography, *précis* and modern history. The introduction of even these basic examinations inevitably weakened the personal links between ambassadors and their attachés, but various moves, led by Clarendon, were made to reduce their impact on young men who, it was argued, were going to give as much as five years unpaid service to the state. Any real control of such unpaid staff was bound to remain difficult as long as it had to be assumed that some recruits were not aiming at a diplomatic career. Nineteenth-century public concern for the abolition of personal and political patronage in public appointments consequently had a somewhat muted effect on the diplomatic service. At the same time increasing pressure of all types of diplomatic work after 1815 was leading to substantial operational difficulties since such unpaid staff could drift in and out of the service and could not always be expected to be reliable. As a result, to cope with the gradually increasing administrative and clerical load, a few paid attachés were appointed to serve below the secretary of embassy but above the unpaid attachés. Their number grew steadily. By 1825 there were seven paid attachés serving abroad by comparison with thirty-five unpaid: in 1853 that ratio had become 29:28. After persistent criticism from within the service, the rank and title of paid attaché were replaced in 1862 by those of second and third secretaries. These established appointments were however still only to be made after a young man had satisfactorily completed his probationary period as unpaid attaché, six months of which was to be spent in the Foreign Office. Not only was the first period of work in the diplomatic service to remain unpaid till 1919, but a £400-a-year income

<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 1 June 1985.

requirement also continued. A pattern of close and informal relationships pervaded the atmosphere of work.

Britain's major European Embassies and legations, in the same way as those of the other great powers, including even France after 1871, continued to be characterised by an aristocratic life-style suitable for the reception of social equals at the peak of local politics and society. It was consequently deemed desirable that unpaid and also paid junior diplomatic staff should be recruited from an appropriate social and educational background such as to enable them to melt into the background, not to put a foot wrong and to be welcome at the ambassador's formal and family dining tables. It was essential, as Sir David Kelly insisted, that, if they were to do their job, 'they had to be accepted as "Court-worthy," people of the same class who observed the same standards'.<sup>7</sup> Although the standards of the qualifying examination were to be raised gradually till they approached those of university final degree examinations, the continuing need by candidates for nomination on first application ensured that young men from families unknown to the foreign secretary or to his private secretary only rarely applied for the diplomatic service. Recruitment of junior staff throughout the nineteenth century remained largely the preserve of the sons of either the landed or professional classes. These young men came more and more however from the major public schools. The introduction in 1870 of open competition for the administrative class of the home civil service was strongly and successfully resisted by the foreign secretary for the Foreign Office and diplomatic service. The argument rested on the different nature and requirements of diplomatic work. Eton came to dominate the entry despite the examination changes of 1904 and 1907: 67 per cent of the 1900–14 entrants were Etonians.<sup>8</sup> What had changed by 1914 was that they had now, in addition, also attended a university, usually Oxford or Cambridge. Sir David Kelly describes his May 1914 interview by the selection board:<sup>9</sup>

I did not come from one of the very small group of schools from which practically the whole Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service were at the time recruited, and had no family connections with it . . . I presented myself at the Foreign Office in an ordinary suit, and saw to my horror that the other ten or twelve candidates (for that was all there were) were all in tail coats! When my name was called, as I went to the board room I heard an awed whisper of, 'Good Lord, he got a First!' . . . Entering the Board Room I found some half dozen elderly diplomatists under the chairmanship of, I understood, Sir A. Nicolson . . . I was asked why I wanted to go in for the Diplomatic Service and could think of nothing better to reply than

<sup>7</sup> Kelly, *Ruling Few*, p. 117.

<sup>8</sup> For a full account of the social and educational background of entrants to the diplomatic service up to 1914, see R.A. Jones, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1815–1914* (Ontario, 1983), chapters 2 and 8.

<sup>9</sup> Kelly, *Ruling Few*, pp. 76–7.

that I liked foreign travel. I was asked one other question, about Balkan affairs, and was then politely bidden good-day and walked out feeling that my inadequate dress had damned me at sight ... However, within a few days I received notice of my nomination ...

Sir John Barnes was sure that 'It is of course true that the old diplomatic service was drawn from a pretty narrow circle and that this state of affairs to some extent persisted between the wars. There were some shining exceptions, such as William Strang, Robert Howe (son of an engine driver, I believe) and Knox Heber; but perhaps they prove the rule.'<sup>10</sup> Between the wars Eton's grip on diplomatic recruitment weakened. In 1929, of ten appointments, four were from Eton: the rest, however, came from the major public schools. All, bar one who went to no university, came from either Oxford or Cambridge.<sup>11</sup>

There had been pressure since the 1861 select committee on the diplomatic service for the interchange of staff between the Foreign Office and the diplomatic service, but this continued to be successfully rebutted on the grounds that the work of the two staffs was totally different and that the junior staff abroad were unpaid and consequently cheap. Following the MacDonnell Commission's publication of highly critical evidence with its 1914 report, the Foreign Office finally accepted in 1916 the principle of amalgamation. Although the £400 entrance private income requirement was abolished and a joint Foreign Office and diplomatic service seniority list was agreed in 1919, the old division between home staff in the Foreign Office and those appointed for the diplomatic service survived *de facto* until 1943.<sup>12</sup> Pay in the service remained inadequate for those with limited means. During the greater part of his career (1919–51), Sir David Kelly found that his official pay covered only about three-quarters of his total expected expenses and still less if he was posted to the Foreign Office.<sup>13</sup> The continued recruitment of those who could afford such a career consequently ensured the survival of the bulk of diplomatic service traditions. The limitation on the joint seniority list and the persisting difference in pay and expenses aided that survival despite recurrent Treasury pressure for conformity. Thus, when David Scott began his campaign in January 1938 to merge the consular with the diplomatic service and the Foreign Office, the full amalgamation of those two, agreed in 1919, had still not been effected. The interview by the special Board of Selection continued to be used to weed out the unsuitable. The practice of interviewing candidates before the written examinations had been revived in 1921. Sir John

<sup>10</sup> Sir John Barnes to the author, private letter, 6 Mar. 1984.

<sup>11</sup> PRO, FO 366/882. Table of examination results, 1925–9.

<sup>12</sup> Valerie Cromwell and Zara Steiner, 'Reform and retrenchment: the Foreign Office between the Wars', in Roger Bullen, ed., *The Foreign Office, 1782–1982* (Frederick, MA, 1984).

<sup>13</sup> Kelly, *Ruling Few*, p. 134.



Barnes who entered the Office in 1946 had found his interview 'a pernicious piece of snobbery and ought to have been abolished long before it was. Mine consisted of Rab Butler looking at me as if I was a beetle at the wrong end of a microscope, although I came to love him dearly later.'<sup>14</sup>

The social and educational background of recruits in the interwar period inevitably encouraged expectations of official and social life in the diplomatic service based on assumptions of an upper class life-style, even for junior staff. Sir Berkeley Gage was probably one of the liveliest examples.<sup>15</sup> Despite his Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge education, he only managed to pass the entry examination in 1928 at the third attempt and was first appointed to the Rome Embassy because, he understood, the ambassador wanted a man who hunted on his staff. A young man of considerable means, he arrived with his 300 guinea horse and proved a great success. After spells in China, in London early in the second world war he co-founded the Thursday Dining Club which met at the Carlton Club, and which he considered his greatest achievement. His Cosy Club in Bangkok and Pink Elephant Club in Lima continued the tradition and his official residences were inevitably known as 'The Berkeley Arms'. Descendant of General Thomas Gage of Bunker Hill fame, he arrived in Chicago in 1950 with a golden retriever, cocker spaniel, brand new Bentley and Dutch valet. The Chicago press was delighted, which was to prove no bad thing in view of the then strong anti-British feeling in the city, which Gage was eventually to soothe. He published privately in 1989 his memoirs, *A Marvellous Party*. It was clear that, even for the many less colourful recruits, the rising academic standards for diplomatic entrants had barely affected the expected and assumed life-style. Diplomatic memoirs of the interwar years together with the records of the Foreign Office chief clerk's department chronicle the continuity. Extensive correspondence on unhappiness with housing provision is a significant indicator. On arriving in Buenos Aires in September 1933 from his Embassy in Chile, Sir Henry Chilton opened a lengthy and increasingly desperate negotiation with London about the state of his official residence. He became so angry that he cabled the Foreign Office to persuade the Prince of Wales to support a new house or a new building: he pleaded that it was a pity to waste money on so rotten a house by building servants' rooms in the roof. He also cabled the Office of Works on 4 September 1933, 'My excellent English servants quite naturally refuse to be housed in dingy mildewed cellars. I shall either therefore have to place them in spare rooms upstairs and be unable to put up guests or lodge them outside, an additional expenditure which I trust would be borne by His Majesty's government.'<sup>16</sup> The transfer of the costs of all Embassies and legations

<sup>14</sup> Sir John Barnes to the author, private letter, 6 Mar. 1984.

<sup>15</sup> *The Times* obituary, 8 Mar. 1994.

<sup>16</sup> PRO, FO 366/913.

abroad from the diplomatic vote to that of the Office of Works in that year inevitably made such special pleading more difficult. Diplomatic allowances were another constant source of friction. Nevertheless, even after 1945, much of the life-style remained. In 1949, Sir David Kelly set off to Moscow as new ambassador with his wife, his wife's Swiss secretary, a Belgian chef, an English butler and their Saluki dog.<sup>17</sup>

Such a glamorous career has to be seen against a background of ever sharper snapping at the foreign secretary's heels by the Treasury, who were determined to bring the Foreign Office and diplomatic service into line with the home civil service in terms of recruitment, promotion, pensions and retirement age. Between the wars that pressure was intensified by the determination of the permanent under-secretary at the Treasury and head of the home civil service, Sir Warren Fisher, to limit the role of the Office as his relationship seriously deteriorated with Sir Robert Vansittart, its permanent under-secretary, in the area of policy-making. By the mid-1930s the Office had agreed to match the same level of accountability as the home departments and, by 1938, Vansittart's successor, Sir Alexander Cadogan, had very reluctantly conceded the argument in consenting to become accounting officer. At the same time dispute rumbled on until 1939 between the Treasury, the Foreign Office and the Civil Service Commission as to appropriate examinations for entry. In 1936, in collaboration with the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Bristol, the Treasury and Civil Service Commission had devised a new syllabus for admission to the administrative class of the home civil service without consulting the Foreign Office and expected it to conform to the scheme. Criticism was expressed of the Office's insistence on obligatory papers and also a higher mark in the viva examination. This encountered strong resistance: as Lord Cranborne put it, 'Personality counts for far more in diplomacy than in any other public service. It is no question of enabling socially favoured candidates to obtain jobs. It is the question of securing suitable candidates for the very special work they have to do.'<sup>18</sup> One of the main arguments for the new scheme was the importance of enabling candidates to take the civil service examinations immediately after their degree examinations in June and, if successful, to start work in October, thereby assisting candidates without private means to compete. Wrongfooted by the Treasury, the Foreign Office still continued to argue for a higher qualifying mark than that for the home civil service in the viva examination and for obligatory papers in French, German, Modern History and Economics, despite constant repetition of the point that such requirements weighted the scales even more in favour of those with means. In 1937, Anthony Eden, the foreign secretary, offered to reconsider the matter if, after four or five

<sup>17</sup> Kelly, *Ruling Few*, p. 369.

<sup>18</sup> PRO, FO 366/975/X1455: correspondence Jan.-Mar. 1936.

years' experience, the fears of the vice-chancellors' committee were proved justified. The claim of special career needs was repeated. Nervousness as to the likelihood of a debate on the issue in the House of Commons in 1938, however, encouraged the drafting of proposals closer to those for the home civil service but nothing had been resolved by the outbreak of war.

The persistence of earlier patterns of behaviour, the leisurely pace and casual approach to work by clerks within the Foreign Office in London is well known. Sir Edward Hertslet's nostalgic memories of the life of young Office clerks in the 1850s with their 'nursery', an attic equipped with diversions for idle hours, their piano, 'foils, single-sticks, boxing gloves, and other sources of amusement'<sup>19</sup> were given to contrast them with the difference in approaches to work in 1900. That late nineteenth-century change can now, however, be seen to have been only relative. In commenting to Zara Steiner and myself on our paper on the interwar Foreign Office, Sir John Barnes suggested a much later date for significant change:<sup>20</sup>

One thing you do not mention is that the whole pace of Foreign Office activity changed utterly with the advent of the Spanish Civil War in 1935 or whenever. Until then, it had been a leisurely life, and they raced their dogs along those lovely, long, wide corridors. But after Franco they had to take life rather more seriously and were worked off their feet. Or so Donald Maclean once told me, but you may think him a prejudiced witness.

Such a change was to become visible in the working practices of Embassies overseas after 1945 at the same time as the Foreign Office, diplomatic and consular services were merged following the 1943 White Paper. A fundamentally different role was envisaged for the diplomatic service: 'economics and finance have become inextricably interwoven with politics; an understanding of social problems and labour movements is indispensable in forming a properly balanced judgement of world events'.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, despite pressure for a change of emphasis, many of the existing patterns of behaviour and traditional attitudes continued.

Very soon after the war and the merger of the three services, with new entrance examinations for the unified service becoming only special variants of those for the home civil service, it became clear that the new, more open methods of recruitment were resulting in the arrival at British embassies abroad of young people and ex-servicemen, who, though often educated to a high standard, came from a much less privileged social background than their pre-1939 predecessors. On the considerable assumption that established traditions and practices would continue, it

<sup>19</sup> Sir Edward Hertslet, *Recollections of the Old Foreign Office* (London, 1901), p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Sir John Barnes to the author, private letter 6 Mar. 1984.

<sup>21</sup> Parliamentary Papers, 1943: HC Cmd. 6420.

was obvious to some that, if these new recruits were to be assimilated into the life-style customary in the diplomatic service, they were going to need more than the traditional acquisition of drafting skills and diplomatic expertise. They were now going to need some sort of social acculturation. It was to prove more than a little embarrassing to the Foreign Office that the means chosen for that was to attract colourful publicity. Marcus Cheke now enters the story. Cheke had had an unusual career. Having been a Liberal parliamentary candidate in 1929, he entered the diplomatic service as an honorary attaché at Lisbon (1931–4), in Brussels (1934–7), then was press attaché (1938–42) and later appointed on special attachment with rank of first secretary (1942–5) in Lisbon before becoming vice-marshal of the Diplomatic Corps in 1946. In January 1949 Cheke produced a handbook for members of the foreign service on their first posting abroad.<sup>22</sup> It appeared a useful and constructive idea and was circulated with a covering letter to posts abroad.

What the Foreign Office was not to need was the publicity the handbook received once it was 'leaked' to the press. On 23 February 1949, two national newspapers carried lively stories from their Washington correspondents. 'You, too, can be the life of the Embassy: 8 easy lessons' was the headline for Ralph Izzard's racy report in the *Daily Mail* on what had given the American capital's society 'its biggest chuckle of the season', 'this modern "The Chesterfield Letters"'. The editor even footnoted that reference for the help of readers. Some choice handbook entries were selected, including Cheke's indication that the book might be of particular use to those in the same situation as Hilaire Belloc's Lord Lucky, who

... rose in less than half an hour  
To riches, dignity and power.

It also reported the comment of a Washington society hostess, on reading Cheke's advice on funerals, that 'A line must be drawn somewhere. I won't have any diplomat, British or otherwise, making political connections at my funeral. I am making a will to that effect.' The *Daily Express* published on its front page, together with a jaunty photograph of Cheke and his wife, a short piece from R.M. MacColl, headlined 'Diplomats told how to handle bores: Mr Cheke's secret leaks out'. This also included selections from Cheke's extensive advice and carried a remark from 'an Embassy official tonight: "It is unfortunate this has got out. Those references to boring guests – oh dear."' MacColl recounted the furore in Washington and how the British Embassy was desperately trying to uncover the source of the 'leak'. This was indeed true and the *Evening News* later the same day headlined its story 'BEVIN CALLS FOR "BOOK" PROBE: HOW DID ETIQUETTE

<sup>22</sup> Marcus Cheke, *Guidance on foreign usages and ceremony, and other matters, for a Member of His Majesty's Foreign Service on his first appointment to a Post Abroad*, Jan. 1949, 81 pp.



Mr and Mrs Marcus Cheke, *Daily Express*, 24 February 1949

NOTES LEAK OUT?' and reported that the Foreign Office had ordered an immediate inquiry into how a copy of a confidential booklet had come into unauthorised hands in Washington. Sir Orme Sargent, permanent under-secretary, was reported as having 'warned all recipients that the booklet was not to be published, if for no other reason than that it sometimes poked fun at foreign mentality, which might not always be understood'. A few choice items from the handbook were again summarised. Cheke himself was reported as having 'admitted that there "had been a leak", but he would not say how or when'. Whitehall fears were also reported that some passages from the booklet might be seized on by Russia and other unfriendly nations as anti-British propaganda.

At the Foreign Office, Bevin, as was his wont, had come in early and read the day's newspapers. He was deeply concerned that the tone of the reports would cause immense harm for what had long since become, for an experienced trade unionist, his loyal service.<sup>23</sup> He was obviously irritated that such an embarrassing text had been circulated without his knowledge. The next day, 24 February, Frank Roberts, coming to the end of his time as principal private secretary to the foreign secretary and equally disturbed that he had not been warned of the decision to circulate the handbook, prepared a careful minute for the secretary of state,<sup>24</sup>

You wanted to see for yourself Mr Cheke's booklet on Guidance to Members of the Foreign Service on Appointment to a Post Abroad. A copy is attached, together with the covering circular, which clearly stated why such guidance was being given, i.e. because there had been an exceptionally large new entry into the Service after the war, and many Heads of Missions were now too hard-pressed to give individual guidance as they used to do when I joined the Service in 1930. The circular also makes it very clear that Mr Cheke's book is only intended to deal with certain minor aspects of diplomatic life, and that there is no suggestion that social behaviour is the be all and end all of a Foreign Service officer's career. The main purpose is to warn members of the Foreign Service that conditions in foreign countries vary between countries and, above all, are not necessarily the same as conditions in the United Kingdom.

I should perhaps add that Mr Cheke produced this book on his own initiative as a result of many warnings and complaints he had had from Heads of Missions abroad. As similar complaints have reached Sir O. Sargent and Mr Caccia, it was felt that Mr Cheke's book, suitably revised and provided the whole affair was kept in its proper proportion, would fill a gap.

When the original draft was circulated for comments, many suggestions were made and subsequently incorporated by Mr Cheke to meet possible criticism that his book was too largely concerned with social occasions in small capitals. For example you will find in Chapter 8 and again in Chapter 10 a good deal of advice

<sup>23</sup> Private conversation with Sir Frank Roberts, 18 July 1994. Roberts makes two points: 1. that some sort of guidance was indeed then necessary; 2. that Cheke's experience had been limited to small and somewhat old-fashioned capitals.

<sup>24</sup> PRO FO 366/2831. F.K. Roberts to secretary of state, 24 Feb. 1949.

on handling such important categories of people as journalists, visitors from the United Kingdom, etc.

Special attention was paid at that stage, while the book was in draft, to the question of possible criticism in the House of Commons if there were any leak and as a result garbled publicity. I myself said that it was most important that this aspect of the question should not be overlooked, and consequently Mr Mayhew [Parliamentary Under Secretary] was fully consulted, and, I understand, took the line that he was quite prepared to deal with any Parliamentary criticism, and that he thought the book served a useful purpose and should be circulated confidentially, even at the risk of leakage and misleading publicity.

I am sorry that you were not yourself informed of what was on foot. When the first draft came my way in May no decision had been taken as to whether the book should be circulated or not, and, while I drew attention to certain snags and made various suggestions, I did not think I need trouble you until the question had been discussed with Mr Mayhew and some definite recommendation was being made. I was not, however, aware of the final decision to circulate the amended document, and could not, therefore bring it to your attention.

It is, of course, too soon to give you a full account of general reactions, but they are certainly not uniformly critical. You may like to know that the News Chronicle have rung up to say that they consider the idea to be an excellent one, and to offer their help in combatting any adverse publicity. At an American diplomatic dinner which I attended last night, although there was a good deal of good-humoured fun, the Americans took the line that such a book should be most useful, and that they ought to have one themselves. There is, I gather, already a State Department booklet on similar lines, but according to members of the American Embassy here, they could do with further guidance.

Sargent had telegraphed the Embassy in Washington on 23 February requesting information on the leak and, in the early hours of the morning of 25 February, received a full reply from Sir Oliver Franks, the ambassador, reporting on the Embassy's efforts to trace the source of it.<sup>25</sup> All six copies of the handbook received with the circular letter in Washington had been accounted for together with those sent by the Personnel Department to new entrants. MacColl had insisted his sole source was the two *Washington Post* articles by their social columnist, Mrs Thayer, on 22 and 23 February. On 23 February, the minister had had the opportunity to question Mrs Thayer, who had volunteered spontaneously the information that she had received the book by post from England. She had refuted the suggestion that it had come from some British government office. She explained that she had in fact received the book three weeks before and had not indeed then bothered to look at it: on reading it recently, she had however realised what good 'copy' it was. In conclusion, Franks then reported an agitated phone call on the morning of 24 February from Mrs Thayer, who had been very upset by the commotion caused and indicated that she had had no idea of the attention her articles would attract or any

<sup>25</sup> PRO FO 366/2831. Telegram 1085 sent 24 Feb. 1949.